

THE AMERICAN JEWISH COMMITTEE'S
FIGHT AGAINST ANTI-SEMITISM -
1938-1950

as recounted by
Richard C. Rothschild
former chairman of the Survey Committee
and author of the Six-Point Plan

This memorandum has been prepared for two reasons:

First of all, there should be an account of what happened during the Hitler period of the 1930's and 1940's when a wave of violent anti-Semitism swept the United States. Today the use of anti-Semitism as a political weapon is thought to be a thing of the past; and it may even be hard for those under fifty to recall, or imagine, what conditions were like when literally hundreds of anti-Semitic rabble-rousers were active from coast to coast. It was another generation, and one separated from the present by an enormous generation gap.

Second, there should be a record of what was done to combat the anti-Semitic agitation of the period. Many members of the Survey Committee, the group in charge of the work for the AJC, have since died, and not all those who remain were among the most actively involved at the time. It is therefore more urgent than ever to set down the methods by which the anti-Jewish propaganda was offset, counteracted and discredited -- not only a list of typical projects undertaken, but the theory on which the plan of operations was based. Against a possible resurgence

of large-scale anti-Semitism, it may be important to have authentic knowledge of past remedies and how they worked.

The Survey Committee of the American Jewish Committee was organized in 1938, on the initiative of Lewis Strauss and Edward Greenbaum, for the purpose of preventing Nazi anti-Semitism, then the official policy of the German government, from becoming a comparable threat to the Jews in this country. It was about the time of the Munich crisis, and already the anti-Jewish agitation by the Nazi-oriented organizations on the American scene had become a frightening thing. Jewish children were not infrequently being attacked on the street. Jewish merchants were increasingly being boycotted. Mass meetings were being held to arouse anti-Jewish sentiment. And in general, the Jews as a group were being vilified as never before in American history.

A preliminary fund of about \$400,000 was raised for whatever work might be needed at the start. The entire staff of the AJC at the time, however, comprised only two or three men and their secretaries, and previous work had consisted of making only small grants to what were considered worthy organizations in the field of combatting "inter-group tensions",

The new group included:

Edward Greenbaum, first chairman of the committee,
later assistant to the Secretary of War

Lewis Strauss, later chairman of the Atomic Energy
Commission

Samuel Rosenman, adviser and speech-writer of
President Roosevelt

Benjamin Battenwieser, later Deputy High Commissioner
in Germany, after the war

William Rosenwald, leading American philanthropist

Judge Philip Foreman of New Jersey

Roger Straus, later chairman of the National
conference of Christians and Jews

Carl Austrian, distinguished New York lawyer

George Backer, later adviser to Gov. Harriman

Harold Guinsburg, founder of the Viking Press

Samuel Leidesdorf, treasurer of Federation

Arthur Goldsmith

Later the group came to include, in addition to myself:

Walter Mendelsohn

Irving Engel

Alan Stroock

David Sher

James Marshall

Paul Felix Warburg

Henry Friendly

Horace Manges

Morton Webster

Alfred Bernheim

Ethel Wise

David Sulzberger

Maurice Wertheim

A requirement of membership was resignation from active participation in other philanthropic activities, and devotion of a corresponding amount of time to the work of the Committee. Meetings were held in Bill Rosenwald's offices in the Chanin Building. later at the Harmonie Club.

The \$400,000 fund was, of course, much too small. But more important was the fact that previous projects had been largely local in their reach and effectiveness. Good work, of course, but incapable of making a national impact. For there is a principle of propaganda which might be called the Principle of Adequacy, according to which propaganda is like a hammer blow on a pane of glass: If adequate, it will smash the glass in a second; if inadequate, it can be repeated indefinitely without effect. For well-meaning individuals, it may be enough to "brighten the corner where you are", as the revivalist preachers used to put it. An organizational program, however, must somehow, in order to have national impact, touch the nerve centers of the body politic.

There was also a belief, held by some at the time, that the best attack on anti-Semitism, or at least the best protection against its spread, lay in the promotion of Liberalism against Reaction. But although it may have been true that there were more "tolerant" human beings in the ranks of the Liberals than among the right-wingers, it was also true that converting the "reactionary" half of the country to "liberalism" would have been a job far beyond the resources of any small group such as this. Moreover, and more important, there was the problem of specificity. For just as malaria, pneumonia and appendicitis are not prevented or overcome by a healthy way of life in general, but only by specific procedures, so there must be specific social remedies for specific social maladies. And anti-Semitism is no exception. The prescription had to be specific. What was to be avoided was what might be called the Fallacy of the Umbrella Cause.

Here was a great objective -- an objective important, not only to Jews, but to minority groups in general, and even to the free world as a whole, since anti-Semitism of the Hitler variety had been, and was being, used to weaken and undermine democracies by polarizing them on the subject of "the Jews". "Divide and conquer" was no longer only a military strategy; it was a world-wide technique of subversion. Yet what was being used to combat it was not only inadequate but sometimes misdirected.

Three Levels of Anti-Semitism

At the start a distinction was drawn between three levels, dimensions or kinds of anti-Semitism.

In the first place, there was basic anti-Semitism, the kind which springs from a feeling that Jews are somehow different, in religion, in customs, etc.. This "prejudice" has a two-thousand-year history, and is tied up with all sorts of religious, historical, psychological, cultural and social factors.

Second was what might be loosely called economic anti-Semitism. For waves of overt anti-Jewish activity have often come in periods of widespread economic distress. Despondent men, out of work and frustrated, fall easy victims to rabble-rousers shouting that all the troubles of the world are due to some small group of conspirators preying on the body politic. This kind of anti-Semitism is, of course, related to anti-Semitism of the "prejudice" variety, since it is the basic "prejudice" which the economic and social tensions raise to fever heat. Jews themselves, however, can do very little about this. For an effective corrective here would mean solving all the world's economic and social problems, including unemployment and the periodic peaks and valleys of the business cycle.

The anti-Semitism of the late 1930's, however, was of a third kind, originating, as has been said, in the flood of propaganda, direct and indirect, coming out of Hitler Germany. Economic depressions, world wars, and a thousand and one things never before associated with the Jews, were being interpreted by the Nazis as having this or that Jewish angle. Day after day, the Hitlerites and their anti-Semitic allies were pouring this poison into the blood stream of the democracies. In short, anti-Semitism had been given a new dimension, a political dimension, in that it had been made the emotional spearhead of a world-wide program of conquest.

The Survey Committee felt that it should be concerned primarily and immediately with this third type of anti-Semitism, and proceeded to consider the possible means of attack on the problem. Legislation, we minimized as inappropriate, ineffective or inadequate. Laws, although they do have an educational effect, can be properly enforced only when backed by an aroused public opinion (as witness the failure of Prohibition). Moreover, it was not the legal rights of Jews that were central to the solution of the problem (since American law makes no religious distinctions), but the attitudes of Americans generally. Finally, American law does not recognize group libel, and a suit

for personal libel or defamation of character would have to end either in acquittal and implied justification of the libel, conviction and the martyrdom of the anti-Semites, or a hung jury with a repetition of the whole procedure and publicity for anti-Semitism generally.

As for myself, perhaps because of long experience in the field of public information and education, there were certain principles which I felt should be observed in anything we did.

First of all, I felt we had to reach the American public as a whole with a broad educational campaign-- intellectuals and labor union members, rich and poor, easterners, westerners and middle-Americans. For anti-Semitism had come to permeate every segment and sub-segment of American life; and it would not be enough to rely on occasional AJC statements, resolutions, fact sheets, protests, letters to government officials or meetings with church dignitaries. True, these could be, and in fact had often in the past been, valuable. But things had now gone much too far for reliance on them alone.

In the second place, we had to appeal to the public, not with mere pleas for tolerance, or facts about the Jews in which non-Jews would not be interested, but in terms of the public's own self-interest. It would not be enough to show that anti-Semitism was bad for Jews; we had to show that it was bad for America and Americans. Moreover, if we could pre-

sent this danger-to-America theme clearly and forcefully, we could enlist a host of allies -- political leaders, newspaper and magazine editors, radio personalities, organization heads. And such public figures not only could reach millions otherwise unreachable, but could make anti-Semitism itself disreputable, and give our own efforts a stamp of approval.

Finally, I was concerned that our program should not be conceived as mere "defense". The Nazis and their allies had, in their world attack, chosen the issue of civilization against the Jews, an issue which, if one accepted it, classed the Jews with all the enemies of mankind, and on the other hand made it appear that the anti-Semites were the defenders of all the cherished things of life. The issue, of course, was a false issue. What had to be done was to eliminate it from the public mind. The battleground itself had to be shifted. The anti-Semites themselves had to be put on the defensive. They had to be the ones in the criminals' dock. In place of the spurious issue of the Jew versus civilization, the true issue had to be stressed, that is, the issue of decent democratic values versus rabble-rousing tyranny. If this issue were stressed, the Jews would find that most decent men and women would be fighting shoulder to shoulder with them in defense of the great heritages of religion, the Bill of Rights, and freedom. The Jews would be, in other words, on the side of the fence where they belonged.

Many Jews at that time, however, had conceived of the job in terms of replying to the arguments of the anti-Semites. Feeling rightly that they were being maligned, their first reaction was to shout from the housetops the answers to the lies being spread against them. In any realistic sense, this was, of course, only playing into the hands of those who were trying, above all else, to make the public Jew-conscious. Arguments that the Jews were not communists, that they were not war-mongers, that they were not dishonest in business -- such refutations, although based on fact, only served to stress the anti-Semitic issue itself, burning into the public consciousness more deeply than ever the impression that it was simply a battle between the Jews on the one hand and their enemies on the other. For Jews to meet every attack merely with reasoned proofs that the attack was unjustified was to fall into the very trap set for them by the anti-Semites, who knew of the Jews' proverbial righteous indignation and counted on it in their strategy of attack and provocation.

In this the anti-Semites had been extremely clever; for Jews had swallowed the bait, hook, line and sinker. Anti-Semitic meetings were held; and well-meaning but thoughtless Jews would advertise the meetings with protests and picketing that made headlines from coast to coast. Put on the defensive

on a dozen fronts, they would scurry around the country broadcasting the very material which the anti-Semites themselves wished to promote. The result was to exaggerate the spread of anti-Semitism and to suggest that perhaps the smart thing to do was to follow the crowd. In this way a "band-wagon psychology" was actually built up by Jews against themselves, leaving the impression that where there was so much smoke there must be fire.

The Six-Point Plan

It was on this analysis that my Six-Point Plan was based -- a document which served as a sort of blue-print of the American Jewish Committee's work for some years to come. The six points were as follows (although not in the same order):

(1) Special campaigns in the mass media, often subtle and indirect, to combat the many misconceptions being spread about Jews -- not by answering the charges and thus dignifying and publicizing them, but by positively playing up individual Jews who distinguished themselves as public-spirited citizens, military heroes, benefactors of mankind through science, and fighters in every other good democratic cause.

(2) A national campaign exposing Naziism, in particular its use of anti-Semitism as a scapegoat technique to divide and conquer other countries. Anti-Naziism, as so conceived, meant (a) the discrediting of anti-Semitism as a hideous promotion by Hitler and his gang; (b) fear of anti-Semitism as a source of

American weakness in the face of danger; and (c). resentment against those who would spread anti-Semitism and its subversion of American ideals of life.

(3) Investigative work in exposing the anti-Semitic organizations on the American scene, of which there were more than 400 in 1939, from Winrod to Pelley, and from Joe McWilliams to Gerald L. K. Smith. This, of course, involved exposing the gangster methods of their operations, and their money-making rackets. It meant working with government agencies and police departments throughout the country. George Mintzer eventually had charge of this end of the work, and did an outstanding job.

(4) Persuading Jewish organizations and individuals to avoid apologetics: that is, to refrain from answering the charges of the anti-Semites, who were, of course, only too anxious to debate "the Jewish question". It was natural, as indicated above, that Jews should be burning with justifiable resentment and feel impelled to cry out against the specific libelous attacks of their enemies. But what was required was to attack those enemies on a battleground of our own choosing, not theirs. Faced, for instance, as we actually were, with a Madison Square Garden meeting of the Nazi-oriented German-American Bund of Fritz Kuhn, it was our job to minimize Jewish picketing

in favor of picketing by a broad range of American organizations, from labor unions to church groups, so that it would not be a battle of Jews versus Christians, but rather a confrontation of a handful of Nazis with the American people as a whole rising up against the indecencies of Hitler's Storm Troopers.

To keep Jews and Jewish organizations properly in line, a pamphlet was prepared, called "Are American Jews Falling Into the Nazi Trap?". Many thousand copies were printed, and in addition it was syndicated in most of the Anglo-Jewish press, several hundred papers in all, where it ran serially for three or four weeks. This little tract proved to be unexpectedly effective in shifting the debate from "the Jewish question" to "the Nazi question", in avoiding weak pleas for "tolerance", fair play, a vague "Americanism", and "racial" equality. Above all, the plan was to prevent the enemy from establishing the issue of anti-Semitism as a blind for the real issue, which was himself. There was also a booklet prepared along these lines by Sol Fineberg of our staff, for local Jewish communities, called "What to Do When the Rabble-Rouser Comes to Town", warning against doing things to stir up controversy and newspaper headlines, and suggesting what came to be known (a bit inaccurately) as "the silent treatment".

(5) The development and testing of a plan for localities, using newspapers, radio, local organizations, meetings, etc.. Somehow or other, we never got around to this on a city-by-city basis, as the national work through newspaper chains, radio networks, and the headquarters of national organizations such as the Federal Council of Churches, YMCA, General Federation of Women's Clubs, and the like, seemed to cover the waterfront adequately.

(6) The developing of personnel for implementing the Plan as a whole. (In my view, this was a matter more of means than of plan; but the Committee thought that it should be a separate point.) We did, in fact, gather together a wonderful staff --

David Bernstein, ^{later} ~~now~~ editor of the Binghamton Sun-Bulletin

Sidney Freifeld, ^{C. E.} ~~now~~ Canadian Ambassador to Colombia

Newman Levy, author of "The Opera Guyed".

Nathan Schachner, author of the "The Founding Fathers" and a dozen other histories and biographies.

Frank Trager, ~~now~~ professor at New York University and ~~former~~ ^{later} Point Four administrator in Burma

Bertram Levine, ^{later} ~~now~~ in the Department of Justice in Washington

James Newman, author of "The World of Mathematics" and "The Tools of War".

Selma Hirsh, now Assistant Director of the AJC

Elliott Caplin, now cartoonist of "Little Orphan Annie".

Max Ehrlich, later a novelist and TV writer

Hannah Desser, ~~now~~ Executive Editor of Present Tense

Alfred Bernheim, director of work with special groups

Henry McCarthy, later Welfare Commissioner of New York City

Ralph Bass, for contact with newspapers and magazines

Arthur Albert

Norton Belth

Harold Field

Ruth Frankel

Lawrence Goldsmith

Nathaniel Goodrich

Naomi Grand

Freda Imrey

Sonya Kaufer

Abe Schwartzman

Samuel Fishzohn, for work with youth groups

Rabbi Morris Kertzer, for work with religious groups

Louella Laudin, for work with women's groups

David Sigman, for work with labor groups

Joseph Wolfson, for work with veterans groups

Ethel Phillips, our copy editor, ^{later} ~~now~~ President of the National Council of Women

Milton Krents, now head of the Oral History Library of the AJC, through whose work our message was injected into an average of 400 radio station broadcasts a day, year after year.

Birdie Edelstein, my secretary

The Salting-in Process

Our propaganda to the public was seldom if ever a pamphlet or radio program openly sponsored by the AJC, with all of the "defensiveness" that that would convey. Rather we tried to (and did) marshall all of the media of information -- press, radio, organization publications. On the theory that few Americans would be vitally interested in Jews as such, but that almost every one would be concerned if they realized that an attack was being made on America's unity and strength by foreign agents intent on dividing and thus immobilizing us in the face of danger. We solicited the co-operation of the leaders of American life and thought.

Thus we sent a few paragraphs along these lines to Sam Rosenman in the White House, with the result that they became, with only a few changes of phraseology, the peroration of President Roosevelt's "State of the Union" address to Congress on January 3, 1940, as follows:

"These words -- national unity -- must not be allowed to become merely a high-sounding phrase, a vague generality, a pious hope, to which every one can give lip service. They must be made to have real meaning in terms of the daily thoughts and acts of every man, woman and child in our land during the coming year and the years that lie ahead. For national unity is, in a very real and deep sense, the fundamental safeguard of all democracy.

"Doctrines which set group against group, faith against faith, class against class, fanning the fires of hatred in men too despondent, too desperate to think for themselves, were used as rabble-rousing slogans on which dictators could rise to power. And once in power they could saddle their tyrannies on whole nations, saddle them on their weaker neighbors.

"Yes, this is the danger to which we in America must begin to be more alert. For the apologists for foreign aggressors, and equally those selfish and partisan groups at home who wrap themselves in a false mantle of Americanism to promote their own economic, financial or political advantage, are now trying European tricks upon us, seeking to muddy the stream of our national thinking, weakening us in the face of danger, by trying to set our people to fighting among themselves. Such tactics are what have helped to plunge Europe into war. We must combat them, as we would the plague, if American integrity and American security are to be preserved. We cannot afford to face the future as a disunited people."

The gratifying thing was that most of the newspapers, in reporting the speech, featured the national-unity passage, often in front-page banner headlines:

FDR PLEADS FOR NATIONAL UNITY - New York News
NATIONAL UNITY TO PROTECT PEACE - Herald-Tribune
APPEAL FOR NATIONAL UNITY - Sun
PRESIDENT PLEADS FOR NATIONAL UNITY - Boston Herald
FDR ASKS UNITED NATION - Chicago News
ROOSEVELT PLEADS FOR UNITY - Philadelphia Bulletin
MESSAGE PLEADS FOR U. S. UNITY - Chicago Herald-American
MESSAGE URGES NATIONAL UNITY - St. Louis Post-Dispatch
PRESIDENT ASKS FOR UNITY - Los Angeles Times

A few months later (May 26) another Roosevelt speech contained the following:

"But there is an added technique for weakening a nation at its very roots, for disrupting the entire pattern of life of a people. And it is important that we understand it.

"The method is simple. First, discord -- the dissemination of discord. A group not too large -- a group that may be sectional or racial or political -- is encouraged to exploit their prejudices through false slogans and emotional appeals. The aims of those who deliberately egg on these groups is to create confusion of counsel, public indecision, political paralysis and eventually a state of panic.

"Sound national policies come to be viewed with a new and unreasoning skepticism, not through the wholesome political debates of honest and free men, but through the clever schemes of foreign agents.

"As a result of these new techniques armament programs may be dangerously delayed. Singleness of national purpose may be undermined. Men can lose confidence in each other and therefore lose confidence in the efficacy of their own united action. Faith and courage can yield to doubt and fear. The unity of the State can be so sapped that its strength is destroyed.

"All this is no idle dream. It has happened time after time, in nation after nation, during the last two years. Fortunately, American men and women are not easy dupes. Campaigns of group hatred or class struggle have never made much headway among us, and are not making headway now. But new forces are being unleashed, deliberately planned propagandas to divide and weaken us in the face of danger as other nations have been weakened before.

"These dividing forces I do not hesitate to call undiluted poison. They must not be allowed to spread in the New World as they have in the Old. Our moral and

our mental defenses must be raised as never before against those who would cast a smokescreen across our vision."

Often we tried to have projects sponsored by conservative rather than "liberal" individuals or groups. For the impact of liberals may be confined to other liberals, and there is no use "converting the saints". On the other hand, if the Veterans of Foreign Wars (a conservative group) speaks, other conservatives are likely to listen.

We organized special departments, under the direction of Alfred Bernheim, to reach special groups. To labor unions, for instance, we supplied material for articles in their publications, cartoons on Nazi propaganda, and even outlines of speeches for occasional conventions. Similarly, we organized departments for reaching women's groups; youth groups; veterans' groups; business management groups. Protestant and Catholic groups were also approached, in the attempt, among other things, to eliminate, from religious school lesson materials, the libel that it was "the Jews" who killed Jesus.

In addition, we had specialists to work with the various mass media -- Milton Krents, as mentioned above, in the area of radio; Ralph Bass with magazines and newspapers.

The press generally proved to be enormously helpful. In particular, the INS feature syndicate sent out countless pieces on the unity theme under the heading "I am an American".

The Veterans of Foreign Wars, in addition to their regular promotions to local Posts, released two full-page newspaper advertisements prepared by us, which appeared in 383 and 499 newspapers respectively.

The Woman's Home Companion ran three long articles on the Fifth Column, Inter-Cultural Education, and "The Mother Racket" (the last one about a newly-formed organization of Nazi-minded women).

Look Magazine ran "Anti-Semitism - A Danger to Our Nation", and "A Fatal Fight Starts a War on Prejudice".

Fortune had a whole series of articles on Hitler in Europe, including long sections on the "divide and conquer" theme.

True Confessions Magazine featured a piece called "I Sowed the Seeds of Hatred", by a self-confessed member of one of America's anti-Semitic groups.

We got some of the publishers of "comic books" to run pieces on Jewish war figures like "Two-Gun Cohen" and Abe Krotishinsky, the hero of the Lost Battalion. The creators of syndicated comic strips were also co-operative, especially the cartoonists of "L'il Abner", "Superman", "Joe Palooka" and "Abbie and Slats", some of them with 50,000,000 circulation.

Material was compiled by Ethel Phillips for a booklet on scapegoats in history, called "They Got the Blame" -- finally sponsored by the national YMCA, with a Foreword by Elmer Davis, then head of the Office of War Information.

The Advertising Council was persuaded to adopt the "divide and conquer" idea as one of its themes, to be passed on to national advertisers in slogan form for use in their ads.

A series of feature articles called "Footprints of the Trojan Horse" were sponsored by a veterans' organization and run in about 600 papers.

Posters for schoolrooms were prepared by us, sponsored by Scholastic Magazine and distributed by the hundreds of thousands, featuring quotations, on the subject of national unity and "divide and conquer", by Generals Eisenhower and MacArthur, Admiral Nimitz, President Green of the American Federation of Labor, and such movie stars as Bing Crosby and Bob Hope.

Every channel to the American people via print was used.

Radio stations and networks, through Milton Krents, became our most co-operative media:

A series of programs on which we co-operated with Stephen Vincent Benet, called "Listen to the People" (one of them reprinted in Life).

A network series by Norman Corwin called "We Hold These Truths".

A series of suggested radio talks sent to Protestant ministers by the Federal Council of Churches.

Special network programs for special occasions -- Memorial Day, New Year's Day, Bill of Rights Day, Mother's Day.

Discussions of "divide and conquer" on the Town Meeting of the Air.

Kate Smith advocating "Ten Golden Rules for Democracy".

Paul Muni speaking at a Statue of Liberty celebration.

When news reached us of what came to be called "The Battle of the Warsaw Ghetto", we decided that something should be done to bring the horror of it forcefully to the attention of the American people, as the kind of thing that could happen anywhere if Hitler's Anti-Semitism were allowed to run its course. The result was that Milton Krants got Morton Wishengrad, a leading radio script writer, to write a dramatization for release on an NBC network. It turned out to be one of the most moving things we ever did.

The above represent only a sampling of one year's projects in the constant barrage of projects which we aimed at American public opinion -- most of them embodying one or more

of our major themes. (There were, however, a few minor themes such as "inter-cultural education" in the schools, "cultural pluralism" in American history, etc..)

The only medium that proved to be difficult, if not intractable, was the movies. Movie producers, directors and writers, we found, were usually in the know-it-all category. And, with respect to anti-Semitism, they had not graduated from the school of apologetics and appeal to pity. On various trips to the Coast to try to modify passages in films we learned were in production, it was always the same thing: it would cost too much to make the change, and anyway it was a good thing to air "the Jewish question".

In April, 1943, we prepared material on "The Mass Murder of Jews in Europe", and the Federal Council of Churches sent it out to practically every Protestant minister in the country. We had, however, received the material too late for it to do much good as far as admitting Displaced Persons to the United States was concerned.

The method of utilizing existing channels of communication with the American people I called "the salting-in process", and I believe that it was the first time in American propaganda that such a method was used -- at least on such an extensive scale. Clearly it could not be used to promote a

commercial or ordinary political objective. But with respect to an objective -- national unity and anti-totalitarianism -- which most media people shared, it was a natural.

Although we never had to pay for time on the air or space in the press, the cost of the staff and organization required was considerable. My original estimate was an annual cost of \$3,000,000, which looked stratospheric in those days, especially as previous appropriations had been only a small fraction of that amount. How I arrived at the figure of \$3,000,000 I can't remember, but it proved in the end to be just about right, and the \$3,000,000 was raised annually almost from the start (*now, with inflation, much more*).

During the early days of the Survey Committee, a number of national polls were taken in order to inform ourselves of the extent of anti-Semitism in the country, as well as of the anti-Semitic beliefs held by Americans of various classes, income levels, religious groups and geographical locations.

George Gallup was the one who first conducted these polls for us. Indeed at the time his was almost the only polling organization in existence. His headquarters were in Princeton, New Jersey, but he came to New York frequently to manage his syndicated newspaper releases. After a year or so, however, Gallup came to the conclusion that it was not proper for his syndicated Gallup Poll to be tied up in any way with outside polling enterprises, and he turned us over to Claude Robinson, a member of his organization who was then leaving to start a polling organization of his own.

The Chairmanship of the Survey Committee was a rotating affair, three to six months being the standard term. My chairmanship was the last half of 1939, but after it came to an end there was a feeling in the Committee that I should stay on on a professional basis to execute the plans that had been laid out. And so it was arranged for me to become Director of Public Information and Education, as distinct from the other work of the American Jewish Committee in foreign affairs, etc..

The Coughlin Episode

There are a few accounts which should perhaps be added to the story of the fight against anti-Semitism. At the time of the Coughlin episode, with a Catholic priest addressing the country every week over a national radio hook-up, spreading the most insidious canards against the Jews, it was thought necessary for the leading American Jewish organizations to unite in a strategy of counter-attack. This was the start of the General Jewish Council, a consultative body composed of the American Jewish Committee, the American Jewish Congress, the Anti-Defamation League, and the Jewish Labor Committee (with the last of which the AJC had always worked closely). Each of the four organizations had two members on the Council -- Eddie Greenbaum and myself for the AJC, Stephen Wise and Louis Lipsky for the Congress.

At that time the Coughlin propaganda had made considerable progress in New York City, and Coughlin supporters were lined up, ten or twenty feet apart, along 42nd Street, selling Coughlin's weekly magazine, Social Justice. All of us were pretty disturbed by the whole thing, and we prepared a pamphlet which was a counter-attack rather than a "defensive" answering of his anti-Jewish charges. It was a sort of plea to Coughlin to cease promoting Fascism and Nazism, however:

indirectly, in this country, to realize the life of terror that Americans would lead in a police state, etc.. Several hundred thousand copies of our pamphlet were distributed on 42nd Street and elsewhere as an offset (not an "answer") to Coughlin's sheet.

Radio Station WMCA was also at this time caught up in the Coughlin episode. The station (owned by one of the Macy Strauses) had originally carried the Coughlin broadcasts in the New York area. Then they kicked him off, and that started a boycott by the Coughlinites, not only of Station WMCA, but of all of the products advertised on WMCA -- an indirect boycott. It was quite a battle, with crowds and police outside the WMCA studio every day.

Footnote: Not long after the United Nations was organized, a man by the name of Raphael Lemkin came into Ethel Phillips' office. He was a Polish Jew whose entire family had died in concentration camps and who felt that one way to prevent a repetition of the wholesale murder of entire populations (like the slaughtering of the Jews by the Nazis) was to give this sort of thing a name, and have it outlawed by the United Nations. Accordingly, he invented the word "genocide" and asked us to help him publicize and promote it,

which of course we were only too glad to do, via press, radio and all of the available media. Lemkin died recently, but in his day his was a one-man achievement, for genocide was in fact finally outlawed by name by the United Nations.

Criticism

Needless to say, there were those who disagreed with our basic strategy for combatting anti-Semitism and who would from time to time press for a new study of the problem by some specially convened Brain Trust of distinguished Jewish intellectuals.

We usually opposed such a procedure on the grounds, not only that it would delay urgently needed work, but that a Big Brain in physics or politics, for instance, would not ipso facto be useful in the field of our particular concern. But on one occasion the doubters could not be resisted, and accordingly a Brain Trust (four or five men in all) was assembled in one of the New York hotels for a week-end discussion. It was headed by Felix Frankfurter. Well, the mountain labored and brought forth a Report, which was given to me for comment. It was a pretty sorry attempt, suggesting all of the obvious lines of procedure which, for various reasons, we had already discarded. I told Eddie Greenbaum that if the Report had been submitted to me for college-course marking I would have given it about a C rating. What

happened was that Eddie reported my comment to Frankfurter, with results that can be imagined.

There was one other Brain Trust experiment, and that was at the Frank Lloyd Wright house of Edgar Kauffman near Pittsburgh -- a beautiful and famous place where a half-dozen of us spent a very pleasant week-end. The group included, as I recall it, Isadore Lubin, head of the Bureau of Labor Statistics of the Department of Labor; Jacob Potofsky, head of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers union, and a few others. Nothing ever came of the meeting, but a "good time was had by all".

In addition to formal Brain Trusting there were, of course, occasional requests that we consult distinguished public relations advisers such as Eddie Bernays and Ben Sonnenberg. I knew both men fairly well and did talk over our problems with them from time to time, seldom, however, with any profit. Neither had much in the way of a suggestion, let alone a substitute plan. Perhaps the reason was that ours was much more than a problem in public relations. For we were not concerned primarily with changing the "public image" of the Jew but rather with discrediting anti-Semites and anti-Semitism itself.

There was also the criticism of our work that came with America's entry into the war against the Nazis, and later with the accounts of the Nazi murder camps. Why argue against Nazism, it was said, when the country as a whole was actually at war with Hitler? And why try to arouse more sympathy for the Jews than that already created by the stories of Auschwitz?

Both arguments were of course based on misconceptions of our basic strategy. Sympathy for persecuted minorities has unfortunately never been a preventive of further persecution, as witness the ineffectiveness of the news of Czarist anti-Jewish pogroms in reducing anti-Semitic feeling in the United States in the early years of the century. Pity is not a very strong or a very durable emotion. Fund-raising campaigns for starving Biafrans, Pakistanis or Armenians raise only pennies from the average American. And indeed a group of psychiatrists we consulted on one occasion concluded that the weakness or pathetic appearance of an oppressed group is as likely to increase public sadism against it as to promote sympathy, understanding or tolerance. Moreover, the documented study by C. H. Stember, called "Jews in the Mind of America", a book sponsored by the AJC years later and based in part on our polls, indicates that even

the revelations of Hitler's annihilation program "do not seem to have increased whatever sympathy may have existed for the Jews as a people or affected public attitudes toward American Jewry." (p. 216).

As to the idea that the increased hatred of Nazis that came with our entry into the war would or could do the job which our own anti-Nazi campaign was calculated to do, the evidence was against it. Anti-Nazi feeling in the United States had existed from the start of Hitler's rise to power, as had the association of Hitler and anti-Semitism. Yet the period from 1933 to 1941 was the very period of the greatest anti-Semitic agitation in the United States by the 400 or more organizations with which we had to cope. Our own "anti-Nazi" campaign, on the other hand, was aimed at stimulating, not a mere dislike of totalitarian government or disapproval of religious or ethnic persecution, but two very powerful emotions, fear and resentment -- fear of the division and subversion of America in the face of danger (via anti-Semitism), and resentment of the Nazis' use of anti-Semitism for their own ends. Neither of these two emotions would have developed as powerfully as they did, without the continued marshalling of the media, organizations and leaders of American thought, for which our program was conceived, planned and geared.

After the end of the war, it is true, we did change our program somewhat in the direction of combatting the age-old type of prejudice. For with the extinction of the Nazi government in Germany, fear of, and resentment against, the Nazis naturally receded. Six years of promotion by us, however, had done their work of exposing anti-Semitism as a divisive, enervating element in our national life.

The Measurement of Success

In the field of history and social change, it is always difficult to match up cause and effect. There are so many factors, many of them intangible, that there is always room for historians to differ among themselves with respect to any one event, trend or movement. In the case of the fight against anti-Semitism, however, a number of facts stand out:

First of all, as compared with the flood of anti-Semitic material and propaganda being poured out on the American people in 1938 by hundreds of sizeable organizations, there is today almost none. Traditional social anti-Jewish feeling is of course still with us -- restricted membership in country clubs and a few summer hotels. And there are not many Jewish vice-presidents of New York banks. Violent, political anti-Semitism, however; that is, the kind with

which the Survey Committee came to be chiefly concerned, has not only died down to a bare whisper, but has been thoroughly discredited, and, along with it, its side-effects in increasing traditional "prejudice". Thus colleges today seldom have "quotas" of Jewish admissions, so that the numbers of Jews in Harvard and Yale have risen from about 4% a generation ago to about 25% today. It is even unfashionable, if not downright disreputable, to be anti-Semitic. It is true that, if there should be another depression like that of the 1930's, all sorts of scapegoating might be revived. In the meantime, however, there is widespread acceptance of Jews in American life.

As to the exact time when the anti-Semitic tide receded, the Stember book is very clear in showing that, following the end of the war, there was "a sharp decline in potential support and sympathy for anti-Semitic campaigns" and that there were "clear indications that anti-Semitism was being far more widely rejected as discreditable than ever before." (p. 293).

Even a year before this, the tide seems to have turned. Thus, "in 1942 Gerald L. K. Smith received 130,000 votes as a candidate for the United States Senate from Michigan; but in 1944, when he ran for President on the ticket of the America First Party, he won only 1,530 votes in that state." (p. 266).

"Before the war and during most of it," Stember declares, "the idea of a large-scale anti-Jewish campaign drew a substantial response; at one time, perhaps as much as a third of the population felt ready to join or at least approve such an undertaking. This sentiment seems to have reached a peak in 1944, together with other kinds of anti-Semitic feelings; it had dropped rather sharply by 1946, at which point our data end." (p.214).

So then we may summarize as follows: Before the war an enormous spread of anti-Jewish feeling promoted by countless organizations preaching violent anti-Semitism of the Hitler variety. Then the counter-campaign of the American Jewish Committee beginning in 1939. Finally, by the end of the war, and even by 1944, a sharp decline in both anti-Jewish propaganda and anti-Jewish sentiment.

This rise and fall of anti-Semitism, one might hastily conclude, simply followed the natural rise and fall of war tensions among Americans. The fact is, however, that the surge of anti-Semitism began long before the war started in Europe in the summer of 1939; indeed by the time of America's participation after Pearl Harbor in December, 1941, it had become a veritable tidal wave. Moreover, other American wars

have not been accompanied by a rise in anti-Semitism, certainly not by anything like this amount of it; nor did this war bring forth comparable attacks on other minority groups. It was almost entirely an attack on the Jews, and along the same lines as Hitler's propaganda in Germany.

It was for this reason that we decided that it was Hitler-type anti-Semitism, not an increase in religious or ethnic "prejudice", as some supposed, with which we had to be primarily concerned. Our campaign, therefore, was aimed at discrediting the vicious divide-and-conquer propaganda of the Nazis and their American followers, as well as the exposing of specific anti-Semites and anti-Semitic organizations by George Mintzer's legal and investigative staff.

It might be maintained that defeating and counteracting Nazi propaganda would not in itself sterilize the soil of democracy against a possible later growth of non-Nazi anti-Semitism. Our program, however, as stated above, was not directed against the Nazis themselves so much as against divisiveness in American life. Accordingly anti-Semitism of whatever origin came to be seen as bad medicine for the country as a whole. And it may be for this reason that today, long after the war, U.S. anti-Semitism of whatever kind, traditional as well as political, has been basically discredited — in contrast to the ~~same~~ continuing anti-Jewish sentiment in Germany, where, despite the defeat of the Nazis, anti-Semitism has not been effectively combatted.

It will be noted that our Six-Point Plan was based on an underlying belief of the Survey Committee that attitudes of the American public could be changed by public education through the media of mass (and class) communication. We understood the Bill of Rights of the American Constitution -- with its guarantees of free speech, free press and free assembly -- as offering the way in which any minority of Americans (in this case the Jews) could overcome ignorance or opposition in the arena of social conflict. And I think it is still true that American freedoms make possible a vigorous attack on our problems; and that, given a firm will and a fair amount of intelligence on our part, anti-Semitism, including violent, political anti-Semitism, can always be licked..

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